3.8 AESTHETICS

This section describes visual quality of the project site and project vicinity, and assesses the visual quality impacts on Dutch Slough Restoration Project, Ironhouse Project and City Community Park Project sites. Visual quality issues addressed include scenic vistas, scenic resources, visual character, light and glare. This analysis is based on field reconnaissance and review of reports prepared by private consultants and resource agencies.

3.8.1. Affected Environment

This section assesses the effects of the proposed project on views from public viewpoints at or near the Dutch Slough Restoration Project, Ironhouse Project and City Community Park Project sites. Agricultural uses, urban uses, and open space characterize the project vicinity. Recreational users of the project area, such as boaters, anglers, bird watchers, cyclists, joggers, and pedestrians, value the aesthetic views. The open space character of water and marshes affords views of wildlife and their habitat.

Views of the project site include open space, sloughs, levees, a complex of former dairy buildings, three farm-residential compounds, electrical transmission towers, transmission lines, electrical equipment, electrical transformers, pipelines, pumping facilities, and gas wells. The primary open space views are of pasture and ruderal vegetation. Viewers of the site also see vineyards, freshwater marsh, seasonal ponds, alkali meadow, riparian, blackberry, and willows. Photographs of the Dutch Slough Restoration Project and City of Oakley park sites are shown in Section 3.4, Biological Resources.

Public viewpoints of the Dutch Slough Restoration Project, City Community Park Project, and Ironhouse Project sites are from the south at the Contra Costa Canal and Sellers Avenue, and from the north at Dutch Slough and Jersey Island. The sites are visible from the west by Marsh Creek and Big Break. From the east, the Dutch Slough Restoration Project site is visible from Jersey Island Road. The levees on the site offer the closest, overall views of the project site. The project site is also visible from high elevations, such as Mount Diablo. Site elevations range from approximately ten feet below sea level to fifteen feet above sea level. The interior of the project site is relatively flat and is surrounded by levees obscuring views into the interior of the site, and therefore is not visible from similar elevations that are relatively distant, like Bethel Island. The site is not visible from Cypress Road because of the embankment of the Contra Costa Canal.

Regulatory Framework

The City of Oakley 2020 General Plan's goal for community and character design is to: "Encourage projects exhibiting excellent design and sensitivity to the community, while preserving the community character of the City of Oakley." (City of Oakley 2002).

SCENIC RESOURCES

Scenic resources identified for preservation by the City of Oakley's General Plan Goals include the Delta waterways, surrounding habitats, open space, and Mount Diablo (west of the city) (City of Oakley 2002). The City of Oakley strives to preserve these scenic resources by implementing its Oakley 2020 General Plan Open Space and Conservation Element, Scenic Resources Goals and Policies. The following policies that are applicable to this goal are:

- Policy 6.7.1. Encourage preservation and enhancement of views of the Delta and Mount Diablo to the extent possible.
- Policy 6.7.2. New development and redevelopment along the Delta, adjacent to Marsh Creek and throughout the City should take advantage of view opportunities and visual impacts to the waterway and Mount Diablo, respectively.

The applicable program to implement the policies is:

- Program 6.7.B. Review development applications for discretionary actions to determine aesthetic impacts and visual compatibility with surrounding property.

OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

Open space resources in the project vicinity include parks, natural and recreational open space areas, and waterways. Goals, policies, and programs address the City of Oakley's desire to preserve, enhance, and expand open space resources to maintain the natural physical and visual quality of Oakley. City General Plan goals include: "encourage preservation and enhancement of existing open space resources in and around Oakley and balance open space and urban areas to meet the social, environmental and economic needs of the City now and for the future" (City of Oakley 2002).

The applicable policies to implement the goal are:

- Policy 6.6.1. Encourage public access in multiple forms and improvements along the City's waterways, particularly the San Joaquin Delta, Marsh Creek and Dutch Slough.
- Policy 6.6.2. Establish buffers from adjoining land uses to protect the natural open space resources in the City.
- Policy 6.6.3. Encourage preservation and enhancement of the watershed, natural waterways, and areas important for the maintenance of natural vegetation and wildlife populations.
- Policy 6.6.4. Where feasible and desirable, major open space components shall be combined and linked to form a visual and physical system in the City.

The applicable programs to implement the policies are:

- Program 6.6.A. Adopt land use controls that prevent incompatible uses for parcels adjacent to existing open space resources.
- Program 6.6.B. Pursue opportunities for additional open space in the form of parkland dedication, and public open space easements, leaseholds, land donations/dedications, and gift annuities.

3.8.2 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Significance Criteria

Criteria for determining significant impacts are based upon the CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G) and professional judgment. These guidelines state that the project would have a significant impact on visual quality if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway

- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings, or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

Alternative 1: Minimum Fill

IMPACT 3.8.1.1: EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA

DUTCH SLOUGH RESTORATION PROJECT AND RELATED PROJECTS

The restoration of the Dutch Slough and Ironhouse parcels would transform the visual character from predominantly open space views of pasture and ruderal vegetation to natural open space/open water with restored wetlands and wildlife habitat.

Views of the existing structures and infrastructure on the Dutch Slough Restoration Project site would change because they would be removed when the site is excavated. The Dutch Slough Restoration Project includes the removal or reconfiguration of levees, buildings (such as the Burroughs and Gilbert house complexes), and surface facilities in the proposed wetlands and open water areas such as pipelines, pumping facilities, and gas wells.

Development of the City Community Park and Public Access Master Plan would transform the former dairy operation, buildings, structures, and open space into views of a park and educational center with passive and recreational activities as described in the Project Description. There would be views of wetland and upland habitat and access on the Dutch Slough property and Ironhouse parcel. Views of the City Community Park would be of fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, an amphitheater, concession stand, pavilion, interpretive and educational facilities, restrooms, off-leash dog use area, a canoe/kayak boat launch at the head of Emerson Slough, and parking lots. There would also be levee trails visible around the DWR lands. The park would use sustainable design principles so that it is compatible with the habitat. Historic buildings would be reused for park functions, while remnants and materials from outbuildings will be incorporated into the design.

With the restoration of the Ironhouse parcel, its visual character would change from vegetated agricultural fields to natural open space/open water with restored wetlands and wildlife habitat.

The City of Oakley General Plan does not identify any scenic vistas either on or adjacent to the project site that could be impacted by the project. Although the project's proposed park facilities would reduce distant views across the site, primarily from the south, the project would not impact any scenic vistas. In addition, the views of Mount Diablo, scenic resources, waterways, and view corridors within the City of Oakley would be preserved with implementation of the project. There would not be a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

The architects of the park and trail system are coordinating with the City of Oakley to ensure that the design of the proposed buildings, streetscape, landscape, sports facilities, passive recreation areas, signage, and other park components would comply with City of Oakley design standards and would be aesthetically evocative of the site's agricultural history. Therefore a less than significant impact would occur and no mitigation is required.

OPEN WATER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Viewers using the City Community Park and public access trails, as well as boaters using the site waterways, would see more expanses of open water if the option to breach open water areas were selected. The option for managing open water pond habitat would look similar to the breaching

option. Viewers would see more tules if the option for using tules as a subsidence reversal technique were selected. Viewers would see more wide marsh berms and a skeletal tidal channel network if the option to construct berms were selected.

SIGNIFICANCE

No Impact; no mitigation required.

IMPACT 3.8.1.2: EFFECT ON A SCENIC RESOURCE

DUTCH SLOUGH RESTORATION PROJECT AND RELATED PROJECTS

There are no scenic resources, such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway.

OPEN WATER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The impact would be the same with the various open water management options.

MARSH CREEK DELTA RELOCATION OPTIONS

The impact would be the same with the various Marsh Creek Delta Relocation options.

SIGNIFICANCE

No Impact; no mitigation required.

IMPACT 3.8.1.3: EFFECT ON VISUAL QUALITY OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

DUTCH SLOUGH RESTORATION PROJECT AND RELATED PROJECTS

The closest overall views of the Dutch Slough Restoration Project and Related Projects sites would be from the proposed trails and embankments of the levees. Views would change from agricultural land, open space, the former dairy, and residential areas to more open water, marsh, tidal channels, uplands, and a developed park and recreation area. Uplands would consist of riparian woodland, native grassland, transitional habitat, levees, trails, or roads.

Views from the proposed new Jersey Island Road levee, would be of the City Community Park Project to the south and the Dutch Slough Project restored wetlands to the north.

From Sellers Avenue entry gateway to the park, landscaping would primarily be visible. The landscape of the City Community Park would reflect the natural and historic setting. Native plants would be used throughout the park except in turf areas, existing historic ornamental trees around the Gilbert House, community gardens, and two contained orchard theme planting areas. Emerson Slough would be expanded to the west and enhanced with native riparian plants. In addition, constructed creek drainages would be designed to extend the riparian zone throughout the western portions of the City Community Park. A landscaped vegetated zone would extend around the entire perimeter of the park.

The Dutch Slough and Ironhouse wetlands restoration projects would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. As described above, the City Community Park project would change the aesthetic character of the site, but this change would not be considered an adverse impact.

OPEN WATER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The impact would be the same with the various open water management options.

MARSH CREEK DELTA RELOCATION OPTIONS

The impact would be the same with the various open water management options.

SIGNIFICANCE

Less than Significant Impact; no mitigation required

IMPACT 3.8.1.4: EFFECT ON LIGHT AND GLARE (CITY COMMUNITY PARK PROJECT ONLY)

The City Community Park Project would include outdoor and indoor light sources that would introduce lighting and glare, potentially affecting views in the area. Outdoor lighting would include the proposed lighted ballfields, amphitheater, security lighting, and parking areas. Low-level pedestrian lighting is proposed at the park and would be shielded to not have direct line-of-sight visibility from the marsh restoration area. With the exception of the ballfields, the City Community Park is proposed for day use only. The park lights would be off from approximately 11 pm to 5 am (Miller 2006). The East Bay Regional Parks' Martinez Regional Shoreline and Antioch-Oakley Regional Shoreline are open from 5 am to 10 pm. Evening (after sunset) uses would be limited to the ballfield area (seasonal) and the historic zone on a permit basis.

Indoor light sources include the proposed vista pavilion, Ironhouse School, education center/boat storage, museum education center, restrooms, and other buildings associated with the park.

Existing and proposed trees, other landscaping, levees, and embankments would screen the light and glare from public viewpoints at a similar elevation as the project site, including the future occupants of residences under construction across from the canal. Viewers from a higher elevation, such as Mount Diablo, would experience light from the project site. Light and glare impacts may be potentially significant.

SIGNIFICANCE

Potentially significant

MITIGATION MEASURE 3.8.1.4.

The City of Oakley shall review its Community Park and Public Access Master Plan to ensure the city's goals, policies, and programs are met. Park plans shall be revised as appropriate. A detailed lighting plan and study shall be prepared for the Community Park. Park lighting shall be designed and oriented to minimize its spillover into nearby residential areas and into the wetland restoration area. Lights shall be shielded so that light is directed onto the fields. Park landscape plans shall include vegetative buffers (i.e. cottonwoods) to help shield surrounding sensitive human and wildlife receptors from park lighting. This issue shall be evaluated in detail in the analysis of the future phases of the Community Park at such time they are proposed for development.

SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION

Potentially significant but mitigable

IMPACT 3.8.1.5: CUMULATIVE IMPACTS (DUTCH SLOUGH RESTORATION PROJECT AND RELATED PROJECTS)

The visual changes from the Dutch Slough and Related Projects would not be visible from public viewpoints at a similar elevation as the project site. Viewers from the second floors of proposed residential project to the south would have views into the project site over the Contra Costa Water District's existing levees, as well as its proposed embankment for the proposed encased pipeline, would screen the site. In addition, views of the park from adjacent houses would be expanded by

implementation of the proposed removal of the CCWD canal levees as part of the CCWD's proposed encasement project. In addition, new levees are being planned for areas to the south and east of the project site, which would also screen views into the project site.

The potential increase in light and glare from the City Community Park project would contribute to cumulative light and glare impacts because the park would be visible from higher elevations, such as Mount Diablo; glare impacts from the lights could be exacerbated by the increased nearby residential receptors. No mitigation is required beyond that identified above for project impacts.

SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION

Potentially significant but mitigable

Alternative 2: Moderate Fill Alternative

IMPACT 3.8.2.1: EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA (ALL OPTIONS).

Impacts and mitigations are the same as Alternative 1.

IMPACT 3.8.2.2: EFFECT ON A SCENIC RESOURCE (ALL OPTIONS).

Impacts and mitigations are the same as Alternative 1.

IMPACT 3.8.2.3: EFFECT ON VISUAL QUALITY OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS (ALL OPTIONS)

Views of the Emerson parcel would have less open water, more low and mid marsh, a more extensive tidal channel, and less upland than under Alternative 1. On the Gilbert parcel, less open water, more low marsh, more extensive tidal channels, and less upland would be viewed. Views of the Burroughs parcel would have less open water, more low- and mid- marsh, more extensive tidal channels, and less upland. Restoration of the Marsh Creek Delta would change views from the Ironhouse Sanitary District's wastewater sprayfield to tidal marsh, upland, creek, and tidal channels. Under the options, views would look similar except the proposed bridge would be visible in different locations.

SIGNIFICANCE

Less than significant impact; no mitigation required

IMPACT 3.8.2.4: EFFECT ON LIGHT AND GLARE (CITY COMMUNITY PARK PROJECT ONLY)

Impacts and mitigations are the same as Alternative 1.

Alternative 3: Maximum Fill

IMPACT 3.8.3.1: EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA (ALL OPTIONS)

Impacts and mitigations are the same as Alternative 2.

IMPACT 3.8.3.2: EFFECT ON A SCENIC RESOURCE (ALL OPTIONS)

Impacts and mitigations are the same as Alternative 2.

IMPACT 3.8.3.3: EFFECT ON VISUAL QUALITY OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

DUTCH SLOUGH RESTORATION PROJECT

On the Emerson parcel, changes in visual quality would be similar to those under Alternative 2. On the Gilbert parcel, there would be no views of open water except in the slough and tidal channels.

Views of the Gilbert parcel would primarily be mid marsh and more tidal channels than under Alternative 2. On the Burroughs parcel, there would be no views of open water except in the slough and tidal channels. Views of the Burroughs parcel would primarily be low marsh. On the Burroughs parcel, there would be fewer tidal channels than under Alternative 2. The proposed park and trail system would look the same as under Alternative 1.

SIGNIFICANCE

Less than significant impact; no mitigation required.

OPEN WATER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The impact would be the same with the various open water management options.

MARSH CREEK DELTA RELOCATION

The impact would be the same with the various Marsh Creek delta relocation options.

IMPACT 3.8.3.4: EFFECT ON LIGHT AND GLARE (CITY COMMUNITY PARK PROJECT ONLY)

Impacts and mitigations are the same as Alternative 1 and 2.

Alternative 4: No Project

IMPACT 3.8.4.1: EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA

No scenic vistas would be affected. It is possible that additional agricultural uses could occur, but the general quality would be similar to the present conditions.

IMPACT 3.8.4.2: EFFECT ON A SCENIC RESOURCE

No scenic resources would be affected. It is possible that additional agricultural uses could occur, but the general quality would be similar to the present conditions.

IMPACT 3.8.4.3: EFFECT ON VISUAL QUALITY OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The existing visual quality of the site and its surroundings would remain. It is possible that additional agricultural uses could occur, but the general quality would be similar to the present conditions.

IMPACT 3.8.4.4: EFFECT ON LIGHT AND GLARE

The existing minimal light and glare from the site and its surroundings would remain. It is possible that additional agricultural uses could occur, but the general light and glare impacts would likely be similar to the present conditions.